DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 877 EC 221 748

AUTHOR Wilson, Barry; Buss, Ray
TITLE What Textbooks Tell Prospective Teachers about Individual Differences and Exceptional Students: Two Divergent Views.
PUB DATE 27 Mar 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Disabilities; *Educational Psychology; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Higher Education; *Individual Differences; *Labeling (of Persons); Teacher Attitudes; *Textbook Content; Textbook Research; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Education for All Handicapped Children Act

ABSTRACT

Forty-eight textbooks in educational psychology published after 1950 were located for review. Half the books were published before 1975 and half following 1975. The purpose of the study was to describe changes in coverage and treatment of individual differences and special populations since the passage of Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) in 1975. Specific questions included: How are the problems of individual differences and/or special populations presented? How is the role of the teacher described in developing solutions to the problems of individual differences and/or special problems? To what extent are categories or labels portrayed as instructionally useful? Results indicated that there have been changes in treatment of individual differences and special populations. Advice from a special populations perspective was much more likely to be definitive and authoritative with regard to the education of such populations, and this treatment often suggested a relatively passive role for teachers and a more active role for specialists. The 48 textbooks and 4 additional references are cited. (PB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED313877

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

What Textbooks Tell Prospective Teachers About Individual Differences and Exceptional Students: Two Divergent Views[1]

Barry Wilson
Ray Buss
University of Northern Iowa

Introduction

The old joke says that there are two kinds of people in this world, people who think there are two kinds of people in the world and those who do not. In education, the debate about how many kinds of students there are is probably as old as the joke. The educational debate, however, is serious. The implication for students can be dramatic and of life-long consequence.

A course in educational psychology is a common requirement in teacher education programs. "Individual differences" and "the exceptional student" are two important topics that are typically part of the course content. These topics are particularly important in teacher education because teachers are encouraged to accommodate individual differences in classrooms as well as be responsible for "exceptional" students in accordance with PL 94-142 (McCormick, 1983).

Individual differences has traditionally been a major topic in educational psychology texts and comprised nearly 25% of an early text by Thorndike (Thorndike, 1914). On the other hand, extended textbook coverage of exceptional students has not been common until the 1970s. According to a recent content analysis of educational psychology textbooks by Ash and Love-Clark (1985), individual differences as a topic has fallen dramatically in terms of the number of pages of text coverage while material about the exceptional student has risen dramatically. This change in topical coverage has been particularly acute since 1975, the year in which Public Law 94-142 was passed (Ash & Love-Clark, 1985). The percentage of students labeled "exceptional" in the public schools also has risen dramatically from 1.5% of students in 1948 to 8.3% in 1976 and over 12% of students at present. Because Public Law 94-142 implied an important role for all teachers in the education of exceptional students, increased textbook attention to the topic seems appropriate.

Our experience in teaching this course indicated that this change in textbook coverage was more than a change in number of text pages. There seemed to be important changes in the presentation of this content to prospective teachers. The purpose of the present study was to conduct an analysis of textbooks in educational psychology written since 1960 in order to describe changes in coverage and treatment of individual differences and special populations since the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975. Specifically we asked:

1) How are the problems of individual differences and/or special populations presented?

---

[1]Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, March 27, 1989 at San Francisco

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EC 221748

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barry J. Wilson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

2) How is the role of the teacher described in developing solutions to the problems of individual differences and/or special populations?

3) To what extent are categories or labels portrayed as instructionally useful?

Forty-eight textbooks in educational psychology published after 1950 were located for review. Twenty-four were published before 1975 and 24 were published following 1975. Particular attention was devoted to including texts that have been popular texts. Relevant portions of each text were read by both authors to develop responses to the specific questions enumerated above. Initial reading suggested two clearly contrasting presentations on these topics (what Krippendorff (1980) calls thematic units). These two types of presentations were labeled an individual differences (ID) perspective and a special populations (SP) perspective. Generally, the ID perspective is more frequent in texts prior to 1975, but many current textbooks retain an individual difference emphasis. The ID perspective emphasizes the uniqueness of all learners and tends to be cautious in recommending specific systematic accommodations for subsets of students. The SP perspective, on the other hand, presents students as falling in several categories each category requiring specific forms of accommodation by virtue of category membership. Just as it may be difficult to divide mankind into two or more types, categorizing textbooks as one or the other type of presentation is also problematic. In many instances, evidence of both perspectives could be obtained from the same textbook although there are numerous examples of texts that lean heavily to one side.

1) How are the problems of individual differences and/or special populations presented?

ID perspective. All students are presented as biologically and experientially unique. Variables such as intelligence, creativity, and learning styles are identified as instructionally relevant. Teachers are advised to be sensitive to variations among students on these variables and to adapt to these variations where possible. Discussion of "exceptional" students tends to emphasize limitations of categorizing students on one dimension for the purpose of devising alternative treatments.

The discipline of educational psychology has strong roots in the realm of individual differences. Early psychologists such as E. L. Thorndike, conducted and reviewed many studies of differences among individuals. In the last paragraph of his early text in educational psychology, Thorndike concluded:

> "A group of individuals does not, as a rule, show a separation into two or more groups, all in one being like each other and little like any of those in the other group, or groups. Here again the rule may be verified by searching for exceptions to it. I know of no such. It is indeed a question whether there are any 'types' that are distinct enough to really deserve the name (Thorndike, 1914, p. 410).

This theme has been echoed by many textbooks since that time. More recently, Sprinthall & Sprinthall summed it up as follows:

> "As you look within yourself and at the people around you realize that you are a very special and unique being...one of the basic

> themes of psychology is that of individual differences. No one is exactly like anyone else." (Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1974, p. 303).

SP perspective. Although every child is unique, there are certain groups of children who share characteristics that set them apart from other groups. These "special" populations have handicaps and deficiencies (or gifts and talents) that cannot be met satisfactorily by the classroom teacher and require treatment by specialists. A typical chapter on exceptional students written from this perspective consists of a list of "special" categories of children, a list of their characteristics, and specific suggestions for teaching each category.

Although the SP perspective may be more evident in recent textbooks, the idea that there are categories of people that are distinctly different from the rest is far from novel. In one of his references to this perspective, Thorndike (1914) stated:

> Until recently the superstition that a great gulf separated children of normal intellect from the imbeciles and idiots was also very strong in many scientific men (p.409).

More recently, this view was described in "modern" language by Mayer (1987):

> Special students possess learner characteristics which are different from other students' learner characteristics. Because they possess special characteristics, these students may require specially designed instruction that is different from regular instruction (i.e. special education). These are the premises underlying the concept of special education for special students (p. 447).

Because the current laws of the United States specifically mention and define several categories of exceptionality, these categorical labels are most frequently found in recent textbooks. Thus, a text by Reilly and Lewis (1983) has a section entitled "learning disabled children" and describes them using the definition that appeared in the 1975 legislation:

> Learning disabilities means 'a disorder of one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written' (p.421).

Having identified these categories of students, there is tremendous variation in terminology used to further describe the condition. This variation may reflect the conceptual and linguistic jungle that exists in special education. Such disparity of terms must, however, be confusing to prospective teachers.

Language used in some recent texts is surprisingly archaic. Thus, Reilly and Lewis (1983) go on to discuss at some length the condition of "dyssymbolia" which they equate with a "primary learning disability". A further description and explanation of the mentally retarded student (the more recent category label is "mentally disabled") in another recent text adds the term "borderline defective" and goes on to explain:

> "Borderline defectives share many of the characteristics of mildly retarded learners described above. In fact, from a teacher's

> viewpoint, they may function in the same manner; after all, the difference in learning ability between students with IQs of 68 and 72, for example, is indistinguishable." (Hudgins, Phye, Schau, Theisen, Ames & Ames, 1983, p. 157)

Similarly dated advice was provided by Thornburg (1984) who declared "diagnosis of perceptual-motor functions is very important" and went on to describe assessment tools developed by Kephart and Frostig as well as a page-length table describing the subtests of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability (ITPA). The chapter also outlines and explains four categories of learning disabilities: dyslexia, minimal brain dysfunction, perceptual, and language.

The variation in terminology as well as lack of current information is particularly evident in categories that require a great deal of subjective judgment for their determination. These "high inference" categories (learning disabilities, mental disabilities, and behavior disorders) are also the categories with the highest current incidence. All teachers are likely to encounter such students in their classrooms. Thus it would seem important that teachers-in-preparation receive a reasonably clear and consistent text presentation about these students, but in fact, just the opposite seems to be true.

2) **How is the role of the teacher described in developing solutions to the problems of individual differences and/or special populations?**

ID Perspective. Textbooks written from what we have termed an ID perspective tend to be rather cautious as well as ambiguous in describing solutions to the problem but tend to emphasize the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the teacher in developing solutions for all children in the classroom. After a discussion of individual differences in intelligence, acquisition, and retention, Edwards (1968) emphasized the primacy of the teacher when he declared:

> The report of a psychometrist never replaces a teacher action or completely solves a problem... the teacher remains the crucial element in the formal learning situation and no other agency or person takes his place (p.

Travers (1973) is typical in acknowledging the challenge of providing for individual differences as well as pessimistic with respect to the frequency with which individualized instruction was accomplished in an ordinary school:

> "if the school system was typical, then one would expect that teachers took quite minimal steps to individualize instruction. To organize learning in such a way requires great skill on the part of the teacher and a head for planning and organizing (p.233).

Texts written from this perspective often provide some advice for accomplishing this individualization. After noting the wide range of individual differences at every age level, Ausubel (1968), suggested the following strategy for coping with the problem:

> As far as possible, the individual student, rather than the class as a whole, must become the working unit for the instructional process.

More recently, Sprinthall (1981) summed up the problem by saying that the key factor was "increasing the accommodative capacity of all classrooms to respond to a broad range of individual differences".

While various instructional strategies have been proposed for accommodating individual differences (IPI, IGE, programmed instruction, to name a few), texts that reflecting an ID perspective do not generally advocate homogenous grouping for instruction. For example, Ausubel (1968) went on to suggest that ability grouping and individualized instruction are two approaches that have been used to accommodate individual differences and he advised that they not be thought of as mutually exclusive. He argued:

> Individualization is accomplished more effectively by bringing together children of diverse ability levels in one class (p.265).

Authors who write from the ID perspective are often skeptical of special techniques or methods. As McDonald (1965) put it:

> No evidence indicates that we should use radically different methods of instruction for, on the one hand, the gifted, the males, and the creative and on the other hand the retarded, the females, and the conformists... none of these broad categories of entering behavior is... useful in the design of instruction (p. 474).

In addition to a skepticism about special methods for special categories of students, texts expressing an ID perspective emphasize the arbitrariness of group membership. For example, Biehler (1971) cautioned students that "the label does not endow the child with a fixed set of characteristics; it is simply a descriptive verbal symbol that is used to facilitate communication (p. 454). He went on to note the social forces that influence the labels attached to students by quoting a passage from Heber (1961):

> A person may change status as a result of changes in social standards or conditions or as a result of changes in efficiency of intellectual functioning, with levels of efficiency always being determined in relation to the behavioral standards and norms for the individuals' chronological age group (Heber, 1961, . 3).

The Biehler text is particularly interesting in that the first edition appeared prior to PL 94-142 and is currently in a fifth edition (Biehler and Snowman, 1986). The early editions appeared to us to be more ID oriented. With each subsequent edition, the SP perspective appeared to grow.

Discussions of special populations in texts written prior to 1970 are typically restricted to children of low intelligence. This reflects the fact that a much smaller percentage of students in public schools were declared "special". Likewise, these special populations were more apt to be educated in entirely segregated settings. The practices and viewpoint of that era is reflected in a comment by

DeCecco (1968) who stated:

> For students at either end of the IQ continuum, the very special educational environment they require is often not within the organizational or financial means of the general public school. Rather than water down or enrich the curriculum for a few, special agencies with both public and private support can often more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of exceptionally high or low mentality (p. 116).

Such populations were not considered likely to be found in public schools and advice to teachers about special populations was often brief. After discussing "defective or feebleminded children...including moron, imbecile, and idiot", Sawrey and Telford (1958) suggested that:

> ...teacher should be aware of these conditions... there are several good books for treating this subject matter and the teacher should become familiar with them (p. 286)

More recently published texts written from the ID perspective continue to emphasize the importance of good teaching for special populations. They do not, however, portray such teaching as "special", requiring teaching techniques unavailable to "regular" teachers. As Sprinthall (1981) viewed it: "Effective mainstream teaching is the use of procedures common to all good teaching". This theme was expressed in a slightly different way by Siepert (1983) who listed some suggestions for teaching slow learners and added the comment: "these suggestions make good advice for teaching some normal students as well as exceptional ones" (p. 276). Siepert later answered the question "what can teachers do for the emotionally disturbed student?" by responding that "ordinary consideration and support for the student as a person-- neither more nor less" (p. 285) would suffice depending on the nature and severity of the problem.

SP perspective. From this perspective, the current role of the classroom teacher is described primarily as referring students to specialists who can "diagnose" and treat the student. For example, the first responsibility of the regular class teacher listed in a recent text by Biehler and Snowman (1986) is "referral". In a similar vein, Woolfolk (1987) suggests that "students who seldom speak, who use few words or very short sentences, or who rely on gestures to communicate should be referred to a qualified school professional for observation or testing (p. 461).

Recommendations for teaching special students often consist of prescriptive lists of specific methods, techniques, or guidelines that are recommended for each special population (LD, MD, BD, etc.). Biehler and Snowman (1986) included seven specific suggestions for teaching slow learners, six suggestions for rapid learners, nine for disadvantaged learners, and five for learning disabled. Woolfolk (1987) has nine guidelines for hearing impaired students, five for students who stutter, six for learning disabled, twelve for teaching mentally retarded and six for teaching the gifted. Some of these suggestions are taken from the special methods lore (e.g. "use the VAKT method" for learning disabled students (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). Other suggestions are hardly unique to the special population specified. Some examples of these are provided by Biehler and Snowman (1986) who suggest: "encourage supplementary reading and writing" ; "foster the development of hobbies and interests"; and "encourage a sense of self-esteem". One final suggestion in this section hints at

broader utility of by suggesting "for learning disabled, see slow learner."

3) To what extent are categories or labels portrayed as instructionally useful?

From the ID perspective, gross generalizations about group differences can be made but these are not necessarily relevant to individual cases. The concept of "overlap", which was used by Thordike in 1914, is also used by some recent authors (e.g. Mayer (1987) with reference to aptitude-treatment interactions to suggest that group comparisons are of little practical value to the teacher and can even be harmful to students. This idea is evident, for example, in the text by Worell & Stillwell (1981) who state: "Labels are educationally irrelevant." Sprinthall & Sprinthall (1981) are even more pessimistic about the categories that were established by PL 94-142. At one point, they declare: "The classification system is inadequate and the effects are damaging."

Texts reflecting an ID perspective may acknowledge that teachers are expected to refer "exceptional" students for "diagnosis" but also can be blunt about the outcomes. Good & Brophy (1980) made the following observation of the process:

> Research on the diagnostic activities of well-trained and highly regarded specialists in such fields as learning disabilities and reading problems reveals that they show very poor agreement with one another, and even with themselves, when they encounter the same case twice (p.528).

Similar cynicism has been attributed to treatments for special categories of students. Thus Good and Brophy (1980) cite studies that led them to conclude:

> Data such as these indicate that the whole notion of specialized diagnosis and treatment, while sensible in the abstract, may have a long way to go before it begins to function effectively in practice (p. 528)

A similar note was sounded by Sprinthall & Sprinthall (1981) who declared:

> Recently a somewhat cynical educational psychologist commented that in the last decade, all the people who sold used cars, bait-and-switch real estate in Florida, and bust-development machines have moved into the dyslexia business (p. 585)

SP perspective. Texts written from what we have described as an SP perspective are likely to argue that categories and labels have limitations and dangers but are useful in securing special services for children. These categories are also seen as indicating which methods of instruction and which instructional setting is best suited to the individual student. Biehler (1986) sums it up in a key point printed in the text margin: "Labels may cause stigmatization but may also lead to special education." Woolfolk (1987) lists the benefits of labeling (p. 454) pointing out that labels still sometimes serve the purpose of opening the doors to special programs or financial assistance.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study indicate that the treatment of individual differences and special populations in textbooks has changed. These changes reflect in part current special education practices in schools. While it would seem appropriate for texts to reflect practical concerns, the advice given to prospective teachers markedly differs among textbooks. Advice from what we termed a special populations perspective was much more likely to be definitive and authoritative with respect to defining special populations and what should be done to educate them. This treatment often suggested a more passive role for teachers and emphasized the role of specialists. Texts written from what we termed an ID perspective were more likely to stress accommodation on the basis of teacher judgment of the individual rather than the membership of the individual in a particular group. Some information provided in recent texts appeared extremely dated and inaccurate in portraying the education of exceptional students. Given the importance of the topic, textbook authors have an obligation to seek current information about topics in this area.

There is, of course, a dilemma in treating these topics. Fischer and Silvern (1985) noted that is misleading to speak of various groups without noting the wide range of individual differences that occur within groups but equally misleading to speak in terms of individual differences without noting the commonality that occurs across individuals. There is a need for texts to reflect both perspectives and to deal with practical realities as well as current research and theory. Achieving an appropriate balance appears to be a continuing challenge for textbooks in educational psychology.

Selected References

Ash, M. J., & Love-Clark, P. (1985). A historical analysis of the content of educational psychology textbooks 1954-1983. Educational Psychologist. 20, 47-55

Fischer, K.W. & Silvern, L. (1985). Stages and individual differences in cognitive development. Annual Review of Psychology, 36, 613-649

McCormick, M. (1983). The handicapped experience project: preparing the secondary teacher for mainstreaming. Journal of Teacher Education, 34, 45-47

Krippendorff, K. (1980) Content Analysis. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage

Textbooks Reviewed

Ausubel, D. P. (1968). Educational psychology: A cognitive view. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, & Winston, Inc.

Bernard, H. W. (1965). Psychology of learning (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bernard, H. W. (1972). Psychology of learning and teaching (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Biehler, R. F. (1971). Psychology of applied to teaching. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Biehler, R. F. (1974). Psychology applied to teaching (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton

Mifflin Co.

Biehler, R. F. & Snowman, J. (1986). Psychology applied to teaching (5th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Clifford, M. M. (1981). Practicing educational psychology. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Cronbach, L. J. (1963). Educational psychology (3rd ed.). New York: Garcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc.

Crow, L. D. & Crow, A. (1965). Human development and learning (revised edition). New York: American Book Co.

Davis, G. A. (1983). Educational psychology: Theory and practice. Reading MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

DeCecco, J. P. (1968). The psychology of learning and instruction: Educational Psychology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

DiVesta, F. J. & Thompson, G. G. (1970). Educational psychology: Instructional and behavioral change. New York: Meridith Co.

Edwards, A. J. & Scannell, D. P. (1968). Educational psychology: The teaching-learning process. Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co.

Frandsen A. N. (1967). Educational psychology (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Galloway, C. (1976). Psychology for learning and teaching. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Garrison, K. C. & Kingston, A. J. & McDonald, A. S. (1964). Educational psychology (2nd ed.). New York: Meredith Publishing Co.

Glover, J. A. & Bruning, R. H. (1987). Educational psychology: Principles and applications (2nd ed.). Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.

Good, T. L. & Brophy, J. E. (1980). Educational psychology: A realistic approach (2nd ed.). New York: hOlt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Good, T. L. & Brophy, J. E., (1986). Educational psychology (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.

Hamachek, D. E. (1985). Psychology in teaching, learning, and growth (3rd edl). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Kingsley, H. L. (1957). The nature and conditions of learning (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Klausmeier, H. J. (1961). Learning and human abilities. New York: harper & Brothers.

Klausmeier, H. J. (1985). Educational psychology (5th ed.). New York: Harper & Row

Publishers.

Mathis, B. C. & Cotton, J. W. & Seechrest, L. (1970). Psychological foundations of education. New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Mayer, R. E. (1987). Educational psychology: A cognitive approach. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.

McDonald, F. J. (1965). Educational psychology (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc.

Mouly, G. J. (1960). Psychology for effective teaching. New York: Henry, Holt, & Co.

Mueller, R. J. (1974). Principles of classroom learning and perceptions. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Royer, J. M. & Feldman, R. S. (1984). Educational psychology: Applications and theory. New York: Alfred A. Knopt, Inc.

Sawry, J. M. & Telford, C. W. (1958). Educational psychology. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Seidman, J. M. (1965). Readings in educational psychology (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co.

Slavin, R. E. (1986). Educational psychology: Theory into practice. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Sprinthall, R. C. (1974). Educational psychology: A developmental approach. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

Strom, R. D. (1969). Psychology for the classroom. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Thornburg, H. D. (1984). Introduction to educational psychology. New York: West Publishing Co.

Travers, R. M. W. (1973). Educational psychology: A scientific foundation for educational practice. New York: Macmillan Co.

Woolfolk, A. E. (1987). Educational psychology (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.